SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY, 2011, **39**(4), 563-576
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DOI 10.2224/sbp.2011.39.4.563

CINDERELLA REVISITED: WOMEN'S APPEARANCE MODIFICATION AS A FUNCTION OF TARGET AUDIENCE SEX AND ATTRACTIVENESS

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The impact of 2 target audience characteristics on appearance modification was examined. Women participants were led to expect an interaction with an attractive or unattractive male or female target (randomly assigned). Female raters assessed the amount of cosmetics worn by participants both before the experimental manipulation and on the day that they returned for the anticipated interaction. It was revealed that women wore significantly more makeup when they anticipated an interaction with a highly attractive target, irrespective of sex, wore the same amount of makeup when anticipating meeting an unattractive woman, and wore significantly less makeup when expecting to meet an unattractive man. These findings are congruent with a self-presentational conceptualization of appearance and provide evidence that attractiveness and sex/gender are powerful social cues that elicit behavioral displays from others.

Keywords: appearance modification, grooming behavior, attractiveness, gender, self-presentation.

In children's fairytales, physical appearance accurately predicts moral virtue and the allocation of rewards. Cinderella, for example, was a lovely young maiden who, in addition to her sweet and generous nature, was blessed with sparkling eyes and a shapely figure. As we all know, good things eventually happened to Cinderella – she went to the ball, slid a glass slipper onto her dainty foot, married the prince, and lived happily ever after. This occurred despite the

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The author thanks Nancy Olson for her assistance with data collection, and Amy Berg, Angela Johnson, Sandra Peters, and Tracy Waki for their participation as confederates.
Appreciation is due to anonymous reviewers.
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efforts of her stepsisters, loathsome creatures whose nasty tempers were matched only by their homeliness. These women also went to the ball, but were unable to squeeze their enormous feet into the glass slipper and so lost their chance at the prince and the happy ending.

This simple story employs a logic that is familiar to readers of all ages – the morally righteous are physically flawless, and this combination guarantees benefits in the form of material possessions, social status, and psychological well-being, whereas the morally corrupt inevitably sport warts, blemishes, or a variety of other undesirable physical characteristics, and are denied access to the resources available to the good and beautiful. Although the rigid moral framework and predictable conclusions found in *Cinderella* and other fairytales may appear to have very little in common with our complex social world, most people nonetheless embrace the fairytale notion that how we look reveals who we are and what we deserve. Social psychological research conducted over the past four decades provides robust evidence for the existence of a pervasive physical attractiveness stereotype, commonly illustrated by the phrase "what is beautiful is good" (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). For example, compared to their less attractive counterparts, physically attractive individuals not only are believed to possess more socially desirable personality traits and characteristics (such as kindness, sensitivity, intelligence, and warmth), but also are perceived as more likely to obtain prestigious jobs, have successful marriages, and experience happy and fulfilling lives (for reviews, see Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Langlois et al., 2000). Recent evidence indicates that this bias for beauty operates below the threshold of conscious awareness; that is, even when distracted and not paying conscious attention to another person's appearance, attractiveness elicits positive evaluative responses from both men and women (van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004).

The majority of research conducted in the realm of physical appearance has relied on a trait perspective that conceptualizes attractiveness as an invariant, largely genetically determined characteristic that resides heavily in an individual's facial features (see Berscheid, 1985). Accordingly, numerous efforts have been made to identify the specific facial characteristics or constellations of features that contribute to judgments of attractiveness (e.g., Rhodes & Zebrowitz, 2002). The results of these investigations suggest that physically attractive faces tend to possess symmetry and averageness (i.e., they have a configuration that is close to the average configuration of a population of faces), as well as a youthful appearance and certain nonaverage sexually dimorphic characteristics (Baudouin & Tiberghien, 2004; Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002; Hume & Montgomerie, 2001; Jones & Hill, 1993; Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999). For example, Langlois and colleagues (e.g., Langlois & Roggman, 1990; Langlois, Roggman, & Musselman, 1994) formed computer-generated composite images of many individual faces to

produce an "average" face and found that the more individual faces they put into the composite face, the more attractive it was judged to be. Moreover, the composite faces were judged as more attractive than any of the individual faces entered into the composite. Using a similar paradigm, Grammer and Thornhill (1994) found that the symmetry of facial features influences judgments of attractiveness; the greater the symmetry of a computer-generated face, the more attractive it was perceived to be by men and women. Certain constellations of features also are viewed as highly attractive. Cunningham and colleagues (Cunningham, 1986; Cunningham, Barbee, & Pike, 1990) found that the male and female faces judged as being most attractive tend to possess a combination of features that are expressive (e.g., high eyebrows, large pupils), neonate (e.g., large eyes, small nose), and sexually mature (e.g., prominent cheekbones, narrow cheeks).

However, in addition to these relatively invariant features and characteristics, facial appearance also includes self-constructed or self-created elements. According to the self-presentational conceptualization of appearance (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985), an individual's personal appearance is composed of physical features, makeup (cosmetic items directly applied to the face or body), and wardrobe (clothes, jewelry, and other adornments that are worn on, or physically secured to, the person). These latter elements are considered to be neither peripheral aspects of physical identity nor a disguise of the "real" self, but rather are viewed as central elements of a goal-directed performance in which people declare a particular identity, communicate with others in the social environment, and increase their likelihood of attaining certain rewards. Thus, although an individual's basic physical features remain fairly fixed and constant, the way they are presented – their "wrapping" – may change.

Implicit in the self-presentational approach is the notion that appearance will vary according to an individual's goals and perceptions of the attributes, values, and potential reactions of the target audience (Arkin, 1980; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). However, little is known about which target audience characteristics influence appearance modification. Most researchers in this area have focused on identifying the individual difference correlates of makeup use, cosmetic surgery, and other grooming or appearance-altering behaviors (e.g., Davis & Vernon, 2002; Miller & Cox, 1982; Roberti, Storch, & Bravata, 2004; Schofield, Hussain, Loxton, & Miller, 2002). For example, researchers have revealed that the quantity of makeup worn and the frequency of makeup use are associated with self-esteem (Brdar, Tkalcic, & Bezinovic, 1996), self-monitoring (Cash & Wunderle, 1987), and locus of control (Cash, Rissi, & Chapman, 1985). Still other researchers have explored judgments of women who wear varying amounts of makeup (e.g., Cash, Dawson, Davis, Bowen, &

Galumbeck, 1989; Huguet, Croizet, & Richetin, 2004; Kyle & Mahler, 1996; Workman & Johnson, 1991). Left unanswered is the question of what specific target audience characteristics will trigger self-presentational concerns and result in actual appearance-altering behavior.

Indirect evidence that people may modify their self-presentation as a function of target audience variables has been provided by Rowatt, Cunningham, and Druen (1999). After participants in their study reviewed profiles of prospective romantic partners who varied in physical attractiveness those participants then indicated how willing they would be to engage in deception in order to make themselves appear more desirable to each potential date. It was revealed that both men and women reported being more willing to lie about their personal appearance when the potential date was attractive than when he or she was unattractive. However, as only self-report measures were employed in this study, we do not know whether this particular target characteristic would actually produce behavioral changes among participants.

The present experiment was designed to examine the impact of two target audience characteristics (physical attractiveness and sex) on the appearance-altering behavior (operationally defined as makeup use) of a sample of undergraduate women. Participants in this two-part study expected to have a get-acquainted interaction with a partner who was either male or female, and either extremely physically attractive or extremely physically unattractive. At the most general level, I expected these variations in target audience sex and attractiveness to influence participants' self-presentational behavior on appearance-relevant dimensions. More specifically, given the pervasiveness of the attractiveness stereotype, it was predicted that the expectation of meeting an attractive target would produce greater appearance modification than would the expectation of meeting an unattractive target. There were no *a priori* hypotheses about sex or its interaction with attractiveness, although it was suspected that women might preferentially alter their appearance more for an attractive male than for an attractive female target.

METHOD

Design and Overview

Participants attended two sessions conducted on consecutive days. During the orientation session, participants received (false) information concerning the nature of the experiment and were led to expect an attractive or unattractive man or woman (randomly assigned) as their partner in a videotaped interaction scheduled for the following day. Each participant subsequently returned for the interaction session. Evaluations made by trained confederates of the participants' personal appearance (amount of makeup worn) during both of these sessions

constituted the dependent measure. This procedure yielded a 2 (target sex) x 2 (target attractiveness) x 2 (session) mixed factorial design with the last factor as a repeated measure.

Participants and Procedure

Eighty heterosexual women (median age = 20 years) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a large urban university served as participants. The women were of mixed ethnicity: Caucasian/non-Hispanic White (42.5%), Hispanic/Latina (30.0%), African American/Black (18.8%), and Asian American (8.9%). Participants received class credit in exchange for participation.

Women were recruited by telephone to participate in a two-part study entitled "Initial Encounters Between Strangers" that ostensibly was designed to examine the early stages of relationship initiation. The recruiter scheduled each participant for an initial orientation session that was to take place the day before an interaction session involving a 15-minute videotaped encounter with another student.

Upon arrival at the research site, each participant was escorted to a room where she joined two female confederates posing as participants in the same study[1]. I explained that the purpose in my research was to examine social interaction and the processes involved in the very beginning stages of relationship formation. Participants were reminded that the interaction session scheduled for the following day involved a 15-minute videotaped encounter with another randomly selected student. I stressed that as my research involved initial encounters between strangers, the participant and her assigned partner were required to be totally unknown to each other. I explained that each would view a photograph of the other in order to determine whether they were, indeed, complete strangers. At this point I took a close-up, head only photograph of the participant with a Polaroid camera using color film, ostensibly to be given to the interaction partner on his or her return visit. I then gave a photograph of the partner, supposedly taken earlier in the week, to the participant, and asked her to examine the person depicted. I followed the same procedure with the confederates who were posing as participants.

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[1] Four female college students were recruited to serve as raters. Each rater participated in several training sessions designed to increase her familiarity with the dependent measures utilized in this study and to promote the accuracy of in vivo evaluations of various aspects of personal appearance. These sessions concluded after each confederate had mastered her task to the satisfaction of the researcher. Raters operated in fixed teams of two in such a way that each participant was evaluated on both occasions by the same two raters. Raters made their evaluations independently and remained blind to experimental condition. In addition, raters were not informed about the purposes of the study beyond the information that the implications of varying expectancies on self-presentation were of interest to the researcher.

Stimulus materials A total of 12 Polaroid photographs constituted the stimulus materials. Stimulus persons were selected from a pool of photographs of college students who volunteered to be photographed in exchange for class credit, and who provided written permission for their photograph to be used in my research. The sample was restricted to photographs of dark-haired non-Hispanic Whites/Caucasians in order to eliminate race as a possible confound. Each photograph was in color, with the person directly facing the camera. Stimulus persons were photographed above the shoulder to minimize clothing cues.

Twenty independent raters evaluated the physical attractiveness of each stimulus person on a 9-point Likert-type scale that ranged from *not at all attractive* (1) to *very attractive* (9). Within each sex, the three photographs that consistently received the lowest or highest mean ratings of physical attractiveness were selected for inclusion in the unattractive and attractive stimulus conditions, respectively. The selected photographs of attractive men (and women) were rated as more attractive than the photographs of unattractive men (and women), all at $p < .001$. Multiple instances of each stimulus class were included in order to increase confidence that the participants were responding to the dimension of interest (i.e., physical attractiveness) rather than to any extraneous features of the persons depicted. Within each condition, participants were randomly assigned one of the three stimulus persons.

Participants were asked to examine the photograph they received in order to ensure that they did not know or recognize the individual with whom they were scheduled to interact. In my role as researcher I then remarked that, in the interests of making the following day's interaction as easy as possible, I would like each participant to provide various impressions of the interaction partner in an "Impression Survey" that would be returned at the beginning of the interaction session. I added that although this might seem like a somewhat artificial task in which to engage prior to actually meeting the interaction partner, it had been shown in previous research that total strangers often take quite a while to enter into conversation because of the awkwardness sometimes associated with meeting new people. Therefore, the survey was designed to provide material around which the participant could organize her thoughts and structure the next day's interaction.

Impression Survey (manipulation check) The survey was designed to assess participants' impressions of the stimulus persons. At the top of the survey form participants indicated the sex of their interaction partner. This item was followed by 20 trait dimensions expressed as pairs of opposites (e.g., warm-cold) along which participants evaluated their partners using a 9-point Likert scale. The sole item of interest for my research concerned participants' impressions of the physical attractiveness of the stimulus persons; this served as a manipulation check.

While the participant was engaged in this rating task the two confederates evaluated the amount and type of cosmetics she was wearing (see Dependent Measure below).

Interaction session Upon arrival the following day for the interaction session, the participant was escorted to the research site where she rejoined the same two confederates. In my role as researcher I explained that I had inadvertently misplaced the previously completed impression surveys, and asked participants to complete another survey while I set up the video equipment. While the participant was engaged in this task, the confederates reevaluated her physical appearance (see Dependent Measure below). I then returned, excused the confederates, and informed the participant of the true purpose and nature of the study. After debriefing, each participant was asked to preserve experimental confidentiality and was thanked and was free to leave.

Dependent Measure

Two independent raters blind to condition evaluated the participant's physical appearance both before the experimental manipulation (Time 1) and on the day that the participant returned for the anticipated interaction (Time 2). The same measure was utilized for evaluation at Time 1 and Time 2. Specifically, raters evaluated participants for the amount and type of makeup worn: lipstick/lipgloss, mascara, eye shadow, eyeliner, foundation/powder, blush, and fingernail polish. Eyebrow pencil/shadow was originally included on the scale, but pretesting revealed that it was worn by too few participants to merit inclusion. Ratings for each type of makeup were made on a scale ranging from *none at all* (1) to *a great deal* (5). Interrater reliability across individual makeup ratings was high (α = .92). Therefore, a composite makeup score was generated for each participant at Time 1 and Time 2 using raters' averaged scores.

RESULTS

Check on the Attractiveness Manipulation

Participants evaluated their prospective partner's attractiveness using a 9-point Likert-type scale on which a high score indicated that they found the stimulus person very physically attractive and a low score indicated the opposite. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) on these scores yielded a reliable main effect for target attractiveness. As expected, participants in the attractive condition perceived the stimulus persons as significantly more attractive (M = 7.35) than did those in the unattractive condition (M = 3.35), $F(1, 76) = 290.56$, $p < .001$. Additional ANOVAs conducted on the remaining ratings revealed that the beautiful-is-good stereotype was alive and well – attractive stimulus persons were also judged as significantly more poised, strong, warm, interesting, sociable, happy,

enthusiastic, involved, friendly, energetic, excitable, socially skilled, flirtatious, bold, outgoing, sexually warm, kind, and intelligent than were unattractive stimulus persons (all *F*s significant at $p < .01$).

Analysis of the Behavioral Measure

My intent in this research was to determine whether women's use of cosmetics would change over time (increase, decrease) as a function of the sex and attractiveness of the target audience. Table 1 contains descriptive information about participants' average scores in each condition at Time 1 and Time 2, as well as their change scores. A 2 (target sex) x 2 (target attractiveness) x 2 (session) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted on makeup scores. Target sex and target attractiveness served as between-subjects factors and session (Time 1, Time 2) served as the within-subjects factor. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for target sex, $F(1, 76) = 16.02$, $p < .001$. Participants altered their cosmetic use to a greater extent when they anticipated an interaction with a male as opposed to a female target (M_{change} = -.35 vs. .12). A main effect for target attractiveness also was found, such that participants changed the amount of makeup they wore more for an unattractive as opposed to an attractive target (M_{change} = -.47 vs. .25), $F(1, 76) = 38.09$, $p < .001$. These main effects were qualified, however, by a significant target sex x target attractiveness interaction, $F(1, 76) = 8.07$, $p < .01$.

TABLE 1
Appearance Alteration in Terms of Average Amount of Makeup Worn as a Function of Target Sex and Attractiveness

Female target						Male target					
Attractive			Unattractive			Attractive			Unattractive		
T1	T2	Δ	T1	T2	Δ	T1	T2	Δ	T1	T2	Δ
1.93_a	2.25_a	$+0.32_b$	1.93	1.85	-0.07_{bc}	1.77_d	1.95_d	$+0.18_e$	2.34_f	1.46_f	-0.87_{ce}

Notes: TI = Time 1 score, T2 = Time 2 score, Δ = change in score over time (positive values indicate that makeup use increased over time; negative values indicate that makeup use decreased over time). Means that share a subscript in the same row are significantly different. *T* and *p* values are given in the text.

To explore the nature of this interaction, a series of follow-up *t* tests was conducted. The first set of comparisons focused on changes over time within each experimental condition. Paired samples (repeated measures) *t* tests revealed that women wore more makeup at Time 2 than at Time 1 when they anticipated an interaction with another, extremely attractive, woman (2.25 vs. 1.93, $t[19] = -2.46$, $p < .05$). However, they did not alter their makeup use when expecting to meet a very unattractive woman (average makeup score = 1.85 at Time 2 vs. 1.93

at Time 1, $t[19] < 1$, *ns*). When the target was male, a different pattern emerged. As with an attractive woman, participants used more makeup at Time 2 than at Time 1 when anticipating an interaction with an attractive man (1.95 vs. 1.77, $t[19] = -3.22$, $p < .01$). They used significantly less makeup at Time 2 than at Time 1 when expecting to meet an unattractive man (1.46 vs. 2.34, $t[19] = 5.45$, $p < .001$).

The second set of comparisons focused on differences between participants in the experimental conditions (e.g., whether participants altered their makeup use more in one condition than in another). Independent samples *t* tests conducted on participants' difference scores revealed that women altered their makeup use more when expecting an attractive female interaction partner than when expecting an unattractive female interaction partner ($M_{change} = .32$ vs. -.07; $t[38] = 2.42$, $p < .05$). However, the opposite occurred when the interaction partner was male; women altered their use of makeup to a greater extent when expecting to meet an unattractive man than when expecting to meet an attractive man ($M_{change} = -.87$ vs. .18; $t[38] = 6.21$, $p < .001$). Additionally, when the interaction partner was highly attractive, the sex of that partner did not influence participants' grooming behavior; women expecting an attractive man increased their makeup use to the same extent as women expecting an attractive woman ($M_{change} = .18$ vs. .32; $t[38] < 1$, *ns*). However, when the interaction partner was extremely unattractive, sex had a strong effect on women's patterns of makeup use over time; specifically, women who anticipated an interaction with a very unattractive man altered their appearance (used less makeup) to a significantly greater extent than did women who anticipated an interaction with a very unattractive woman ($M_{change} = -.87$ vs. -.07; $t[38] = 4.30$, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The primary goal in this study was to determine whether or not and, if they did, to what extent women participants would alter their personal appearance as a function of two target audience characteristics. The results indicated that both the sex and the physical attractiveness of the target influenced the amount of makeup women chose to wear. Specifically, women who anticipated interacting with an attractive target of either sex increased their use of cosmetics, electing to use significantly more makeup at the second meeting. Women who anticipated meeting an unattractive male target changed their use of makeup by significantly decreasing the amount of cosmetics they wore. The only participants who did not change their makeup use were those who expected to meet an unattractive female target; these women wore the same amount of makeup that they usually did. These findings support a self-presentational conceptualization of physical

appearance and also provide behavioral evidence in support of earlier self-report data indicating that people are willing to alter their appearance in response to various target audience attributes (e.g., Rowatt et al., 1999).

Some theorists and researchers have characterized self-modification behaviors as deceptive, particularly when they involve the alteration of physical appearance and/or when they occur in the service of romantic/sexual goals (e.g., mate attraction, mate retention; see Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1998; Tooke & Camire, 1991). Certainly if appearance is limited to the innate, genetically determined physical features with which one is born, then any attempt to alter or change these features (e.g., through the application of makeup, the use of cosmetic surgery) can be viewed as a manipulative and even deceitful attempt to falsify or hide one's true nature from observers. However, if one accepts that appearance encompasses more than invariant physical features, then the modification of one's face via makeup, cosmetics, accessories, and other adornments is not a deceptive masking of the true self but, rather, a reflection of personal identity.

Indeed, the notion that the self-concept is flexible, and that people can, and very often do, alter the images they present to others in the social environment, is a basic tenet of many psychological theories of the self and identity. For example, the pioneering American psychologist William James (1890/1950) posited that the self-concept has multiple constituents (including a physical component consisting of the body and "ornamental" accoutrements) and takes on different forms depending on the nature of the audience to whom it is directed. This notion has been echoed by subsequent theorists in areas as diverse as symbolic interactionism (e.g., Cooley, 1902/1922; Mead, 1934), interpersonal psychiatry (e.g., Sullivan, 1953), role theory (e.g., Biddle & Thomas, 1966), and personality (e.g., Snyder, 1974, 1987). In sum, the self-presentational framework provides a different, arguably more positive, lens through which to view appearance modification and other behavioral displays of the self-concept.

The results of this study also provide evidence that a person's physical attractiveness, however created or defined, serves as a powerful social cue that elicits behavior from others. As predicted, participants in the current study wore more makeup for highly attractive male and female targets than they did for targets they perceived as less attractive. Additionally, in accordance with literature on the physical attractiveness stereotype, participants also believed that the highly attractive targets were "better" – that is, smarter, kinder, warmer, more intelligent, more sociable, and so forth – than the less attractive targets were.

Of particular interest was the interaction between the target's level of physical attractiveness and his or her sex. As noted earlier, the unattractive male target elicited the greatest appearance modification from our participants – women changed their facial appearance more for him than they did for any other target, and they did so by *decreasing* the amount of cosmetics they utilized. Our

sample consisted of relatively young, heterosexual women, and it is possible that their appearance modification represented a deliberate effort to decrease the likelihood of receiving romantic overtures from an unappealing (and presumably heterosexual) man. Insofar as men are likely to interpret even the slightest of behavioral indices as signs of sexual interest (see Regan & Berscheid, 1999), actions that are designed to downplay appearance cues and allow the actor to claim a less attractive identity would seem a reasonable response for women to make when faced with an undesirable potential partner. However, it is important to recognize that because, in this research, participants were not asked to explain why they did or did not alter their appearances, there was no way of knowing the consciously accessible motivations underlying their behavior.

The fact that women reduced their use of cosmetics when expecting an unattractive male interaction partner but did not do so when expecting an unattractive female supports a growing body of research documenting the significant role that male beauty plays in heterosexual and primarily romantic attraction. Not only has it been found that women increasingly emphasize physical attractiveness as a desirable male attribute (see Regan, 1998; Regan & Joshi, 2003), but men are becoming correspondingly more focused on, and concerned about, their appearance. For example, Hankey, Leslie, and Lean (2002) found that one of the primary reasons that obese and overweight men seek to lose weight is to improve their physical appearance as opposed to their health or fitness levels. Although many researchers who have studied attractiveness and appearance-altering behavior such as weight loss, cosmetic surgery, and makeup use have emphasized the importance of appearance in determining women's perceived attractiveness and desirability as social objects, results from the present study suggest that greater attention should be paid to the role of appearance in determining men's desirability and the impact of men's appearance on the responses and evaluations of those observing them.

As with all research, there are a number of limitations in this study that must be addressed. The decision to use women and not men as participants in this study rests, as in most appearance modification research, on the recognition that women traditionally have had access to a greater variety of socially sanctioned, appearance-altering products and techniques and thus make more suitable participants for this kind of investigation. This decision was not intended to suggest that it is only women who are affected by self-presentational concerns or who will systematically alter their appearance as a function of target-audience characteristics. On the contrary, I would propose that men are equally willing to engage in grooming behaviors or other appearance-altering techniques in order to impress those whom they perceive as having access to powerful resources, to meet the normative demands of social situations, or to fulfill certain personal goals. In addition, as the number of grooming and stylistic options for men

continues to increase, men will find themselves able to create and maintain a greater variety of images, and, therefore, to give increasingly complex and varied performances. An interesting and necessary extension of this study, then, would be to examine the ways in which men adjust their images as a function of different, self-relevant situational and audience variables.

In sum, in *Cinderella* and other fairytales we are told that beauty is much more than skin deep and that what we see is fixed and unchanging. The results gained in the present study tell a different story. Beauty is, to some extent, only skin deep, and since skin can be painted, adorned, and otherwise modified, what we see will vary according to the goals and motivations of the individual upon whom we gaze.

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